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600CW—DXpedition to Puntland, Somalia condensed

from an article submitted by Andrea Panati, IK1PMR, and Silvano Borsa, I2YSB, for the 600CW team

In October 2004, I (Andrea, IK1PMR) was giving a talk at an annual SP DX Club meeting in Bydgoszcz, Poland about the T33C expedition to Banaba Island and I was still unable to answer the usual question, "Where do you go next?" A few days later in Warsaw, I received an e-mail from my friend Silvano, I2YSB, asking if I would be interested in joining the 600CW DXpedition. My reply was instantaneous as I never refused an invitation to rare DX activations.

Adriano, IK2GNW, was also involved but at the last minute he was unable to join the DXpedition due to health problems. The team was quickly completed by Beppe, IK2WXV; Marcello, IK2DIA; and Riccardo, IZ5BRW. All were part of DXpeditions to 5U Niger in 2002.

The trip

Planning proceeded with hundreds of e-mails and phone calls until our departure on 01 February 2005.

Landing in Dubai on time with all our baggage was a good start; however, the UAE security didn't like our cases full of cables and accessories and they decided to lock three of our boxes until the next day when we would check-in with Daallo Airlines for our next flight to Djibouti.

We spent about 20 hours in Dubai, a very dynamic and interesting city with wonderful weather but huge traffic jams. There are shops and mar-



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kets everywhere and at any time trading is the essence of the city. People from all continents meet and make business there. It was no problem for us to find in Dubai the last items we needed including some robust tape to reseal our boxes that were opened for security inspection!

At 0100 a.m. we were on a truck with our baggage, ready to recollect our large boxes from the security office and then check-in at 0400 for Djibouti.

The flight to Djibouti was comfortable and no problem. There we boarded an old ex-USSR Antonov

AN24 airplane to Somalia and in about two hours we reached our destination, Galkayo, in the Puntland region of Somalia. A quick look from the window revealed the city structure: a large array of square buildings, almost all the same size, same color, and same plain roof. Streets were simply a mix of dust, stones, and holes of different sizes. All of this, of course, under a strong sun.

Landing in Galkayo

Being the last one to get on the plane, I was now the first of the team

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The 600CW team displays INDEXA flag

to set foot on the land of Somalia. It was a great assurance to see Adan, 600N, local ham and Director of Radio Daljir, come to me and energetically shake my hand. He was immediately followed by Professor Hussein and others. Our identity was obvious from the color of our skin and from the hat with the "600CW" callsign on it (an essential item under the sun at those latitudes).

I was quick to take a picture of the other team members getting off the plane, but no more. I was immediately blocked by several persons asking for "no camera." We had to ask permission before taking photos or video and several times we didn't obtain such permission.

Adan and Hussein then accompanied us to a guesthouse in Galkayo which would be our main base and the place where we would setup our first station.

DXpedition setup

We immediately unpacked our baggage at the guesthouse. Then, the team started assembling the first antenna, a vertical for 30/40/80m.

I was the only one on the team to be exonerated from antenna work. I was in charge of making videos and pictures of the setup phases, plus some public relations activities that led me to a good lunch. To my surprise, after a Somali soup, I found myself eating good Italian spaghetti with Hussein, who spoke to me in perfect Italian. To my surprise, the owner of the restaurant spoke Italian,

too, and he spent 5 years in Torino.

Of course, I was prepared to speak English or other languages and to eat rice or camel for this PR lunch but eating pasta with Italian speaking people made me immediately feel better and probably made things easier for everybody! Some common cultural background was evident, and the malaria tablet I had to take was the only aspect that reminded me I was in Africa and not in Italy in that specific moment.

In the afternoon, before sunset, despite being tired we had to hurry to find suitable pipes to erect our antennas and a generator to overcome frequent power faults. Hussein was an invaluable helper for these logisti-



**Adan, 600N
Director of Radio Daljir in Galkayo**

cal tasks. We went to a private house to pickup a generator. Our first visit to a Somali house was a surprise: no floor, no real bathroom, a lot of mosquitoes everywhere but, on the other hand, satellite TV and internet connection were available! A contrast that is difficult to describe.

60 on the air

By sunset, the station at the guesthouse was ready to go on the air but our new friends invited us to go out for dinner. We could not refuse their kind offer, but on the other hand we knew that thousands of DXers worldwide were waiting for us to show and some of them would worry otherwise.

I was the only one of the team who had real food at lunch so I started the operations at 1500 UTC on 3 February 2005 signing 600CW on 10118 kHz. It was not a surprise to generate an instantaneous huge pileup on 10119 and up!

When the other team members

came back from dinner, they told me about checkpoints on the road by armed groups. All went smooth because they were accompanied by our Somali friends; nevertheless, we understood that nighttime is not always a safe time for visitors. It was the only time one of us was left alone; we always split into groups of 2-3 persons since that first evening.

Security at the guesthouse was guaranteed by an armed guard all and each night, sitting or sleeping just a few meters from our antennas.

Putting a big signal on top band

The next day we setup our second HF station at Radio Daljir, a 103 MHz FM broadcast station in Galkayo. The choice was motivated by the presence of a 50 meters tower nearby which we could use for our 160m inverted-V dipole antenna.

From 04 to 16 February, every night two of our mainly CW operators had shifts at Radio Daljir to operate the low bands station. To go around after sunset and come back at sunrise, we had to hire a driver because it's a bit dangerous to move around alone, and it's also quite difficult to find the way. There are no signs or lights of any kind on the streets, just holes.

Around 10:30 p.m. we were usually locked inside Radio Daljir, with armed guards outside, to guarantee

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security for us and the broadcasting equipment. Galkayo is now considered reasonably safe (compared to the capital, Mogadishu), however, many people own weapons and shots were heard almost every night.

The top band offered us great satisfactions on several nights.



Buildings were the same sizes and colors. Streets were a mix of dust, stones, and holes of different sizes.

Daytime in Galkayo

Our typical day included a light breakfast with tea and biscuits, some rice or pasta with camel meat at lunch, then tea again for a very quick dinner, with shifts to keep our stations running 24 hours a day except when we had to attend social events which took priority.

During the day, operations took

place on the high HF bands, with a lot of EU at any time, some JA in our morning, and NA in the afternoon. US east coast and midwest were no problem and we were able to log 3380 NA contacts on all bands from 10m to 160m.

The most difficult challenge was hearing W6s and W7s. We were aware of this and looked for them every afternoon on CW before our sunset.

Public relations

Public relations were essential in 6O. We were guests in a foreign country where a visitor can't really do much alone without help from local people. Somali were very helpful and friendly with us. They helped for logistics, food, internet access, Visas, licenses and much more. Somalia is indeed a country which looks forward for development and peace after a disastrous 14-yr. civil war.

We really thank our local friends, in particular the Directors of Radio Daljir and Radio Galkayo and their staff, for outstanding help and hospitality.

Amateur radio was reintroduced in Somalia by Sam Voron VK2BVS/600A, who was in Australia at the time of our visit. Several hams reside now in Galkayo, and amateur radio courses are planned.

On 14 February we had the pleasure to meet and share lunch with the President of SARFEN (Somalia Amateur Radio Friendship and Emergency Network—the Somali amateur radio organization).

The next day Sahra (the Secretary General of SARFEN, also Director of the Somalia Female Development Organization) visited us at the guest-house station and it was my great honor to show her how to operate the equipment that we would leave to 6O amateurs on our departure. I made two contacts, then I gave the microphone to Sahra for the next few QSOs. Elmering a YL in a developing country is an interesting and rewarding experience. She had no time to do more radio that afternoon, but her

satisfaction for the possibility to make those radio contacts was evident on her face.

If it's difficult for a Somali man to gain access to a complete HF station, it's even more difficult for a woman. Women there have to dress and behave in specific ways, as in most of Africa. We, as guests, have to respect their traditions and rules without interference because it's their country. Our mission was to mount a DXpedition and also to help Somali hams (or future hams) with basic training and equipment donations. Their social and political issues are well behind our scope.

Sahra showed us the building that should host the amateur radio society and she told us that 25 women are already interested in attending the amateur radio courses to gain a license. We'll stay in touch by e-mail to see their progress.

On 16 February, the last full day in Galkayo, Beppe and Riccardo visited the city market with Hussein and our driver to buy souvenirs for us, mainly wooden bells which are used for camels.

Leaving Somalia

We left our 160m antenna at 45m with 80m feedline, our six bands beam antenna with rotor, a Yaesu FT-847 transceiver, 500w solid state power amplifier, power supply, PK-232, Yaesu FT-757 transceiver, 3 VHF/UHF handhelds and several accessories to Somali hams, to help the development of amateur radio in the country. This

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4 eI 6 bands — 600CW

INDEXA Ballot—2005-2006

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Please vote by paper ballot.

If you receive the e-version of the newsletter, print the ballot and mail it in paper form only; not via e-mail. If you are unable to print your ballot, the election officer, W4UNP, will at your request mail a paper ballot to you via the USPS. Send your request to w4unp@comporium.net.

All ballots must be returned to the election officer no later than 30 September 2005.

Election Officer

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6O0CW.....conclusion

donation was possible thanks to the generosity of our major sponsors.

Our new Somali friends already invited us to come back and it's possible that this will happen in the future to give out more new ones. Our sincere thanks go to the Somali people and our many sponsors.

(Postscript: Adan, 6O0N, Director of Radio Daljir in Galkayo, died in a car accident. The 6O0CW team remembers him with affection. Adan was one of the persons responsible for the success of our DXpedition to Somalia. The next DXpedition will be devoted to you dear Adan.)

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